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ABSTRACT

A Swedish project was designed to address the question, "What contribution is popular education making today toward the emergence of a more democratic society?" The 2-year project involved adult education associations and folk high schools. The project had three tasks: (1) to chart equality of opportunity and to show where women are located in adult education associations, folk high schools, and their activities; (2) to synthesize and analyze research into adult and popular education from women's perspective; and (3) to compile an inventory and a description of the measures taken within adult education associations and folk high schools for, by, and with women. The study confirms the image of the folk high school as a sexually segregated institution. Nearly half the female participants had worked in the caring and service sector, and nearly half of them also wanted to supplement their education with a view to changing jobs. All adult education associations had a number of study circles dealing with women's questions. None of them, however, had taken any special steps to adapt their activities to women's situation, beyond what the participants could achieve by themselves. The equal opportunities question has attracted some attention at the national level, and some activities have been developed to meet the concerns. The study found that research has not taken women's specific questions as its starting point; rather, women have been viewed as an aspect of a problem. The contribution of women has not been described. However, some projects are now being conducted for women. (KC)

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SCHOOL RESEARCH NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 1989 FIELD-TOPIC 1989:8

Equal opportunities
Adult education associations and folk high school
Adult education

Concluded project:
WOMEN´S PERSPECTIVE ON POPULAR EDUCATION

Most of the participants in adult education are women. Both men´s and women´s choices of education and educational activity are highly stereotyped.

Decision-making assemblies are dominated by men. And the people who analyse, study and research adult education are also men.

A women´s perspective on popular education and adult education is lacking, and so too are topics of inquiry specific to women. As a result of all this, women are made invisible and their cognitive needs, their educational motives and impediments are not problematised or highlighted.
The NBE project *Women´s perspective on popular education* was inaugurated in 1986 to elucidate the importance of popular education to women and the importance of women to popular education.

PROJECT CONDUCTED AT:
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SCHOOL RESEARCH NEWSLETTER 1985-1989

1985:1 Creativity and communication: music and art education
1985:2 Childrens participation at junior level
1985:3 Programme for recurrent educational situation reports
1985:4 Discovery learning and cognitive development - the UKU-project
1985:5 Man in a changing society - MIS
1985:6 Systematic evaluation of the "forest in school" project
1985:7 Evaluation of experimental concentration of studies in upper secondary school
1985:8 Pupils working environment at school in use- EMILIA
1985:9 Immigrant pupils at the senior level of compulsory school and in the upper secondary school
1986:1 Education - Society: Curricular theory
1986:2 IEA Written composition study
1986:3 UTRES - Evaluation of resource utilisation in upper secondary school
1986:4 Technology and Science in school and society
1986:5 Historical image and historical awarness
1986:6 Political and citizenship education in Swedish schools in the 20th century
1986:7 Feasibility of joint studies in adult education
1986:8 Studies of the innovation process in compulsory school
1986:9 Girls in science and technology
1986:10 Evaluation trough pupil follow up - the UGU project
1987:1 Young people and peace
1987:2 Functional opportunities of the school administration in municipa - lities with local agencies and free municipality experiments
1987:3 Steering strategies in a decentralised decitionmaking system
1987:4 The outward efficiency of schools
1987:5 Swedish in upper secondary school - two worlds?
1988:1 META-studies
1988:2 Pupils frames of reference and the content of teaching
1988:3 Follow-up of the in-service training programme " An upper secondary school for all"
1988:4 A Cognitive Taxonomy for mathematics teaching
1988:5 Psychological Mechanisms in children with deficient empathy and sympathy
1989:1 Decentralisation in school administration
1989:2 Alternative Course in mathematics
1989:3 Effects of decentralisation in the school sector
1989:4 Childrens conceptions of division and of equal parts
1989:5 Evaluation of education for industry
1989:6 Swedish schools in an international perspective

Equal opportunities in adult and popular education are not just a matter of trying to recruit equal numbers of women and men for traditional study programmes. To no less an extent, women must help to decide, for example, the content and working procedures of different study programmes, and women's experiences and mentality must be introduced at all levels; in short, a feminine perspective is needed in adult and popular education.

"Seeing how slowly things are moving as regards women's integration in our organisation and community activities, one cannot help inquiring after the reason."

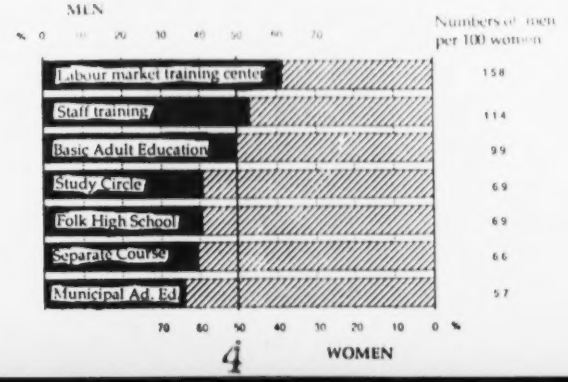
These thought-provoking words could have been uttered today, but they were actually written by a woman popular educator, Hulda Flood, in No. 24 of the ABF (Workers' Educational Association) publication series as long ago as 1945. The heading was "Women and men - what stands in the way of equality?". She was appalled by the way in which women voluntarily stepped aside, allowing men to govern even in assemblies where women were in the majority. Hulda Flood believed that popular education in the form of study circle activities had a great mission. This being so, what contribution is popular education making today towards the emergence of a more democratic society? This is the great and overriding question which an attempt has been made to answer in the NBE project *Women's perspective on popular education*.

Background

Every year, roughly one out of every two adults between the ages of 16 and 64 take part in some form of adult education. This high adult education participation rate is probably uniquely Swedish. About 2.5 million of these people take part in circles run by the adult education associations. Some 17,000 join long-term courses at folk high schools and another 230,000 take short-cycle courses. What is more, women outnumber men in adult education.

Estimated numbers of persons who participated in the adult education in 1986

Table 1



Study circle activities, for example, have long included a larger proportion of women that men. Adult education and popular education, moreover, have a high level of segregation between the sexes, with women and men taking different study programmes. The men occupy most places in programmes leading to employment. They predominate in employment training and personnel education, which for the most part means vocational studies in traditional men's fields.

Women go in more for folk high school courses and study circles. Here it is languages, humanities and behavioural sciences that predominate, as well as courses and circles in artistic and practical subjects.

Folk high schools

The folk high schools today are attracting progressively younger people. Roughly one-third of their students are men and women aged 30 or over. Municipal and county council folk high schools attract a slightly larger proportion of women than those run by popular movements and supportive organisations. Men predominate at two of the popular movement folk high schools and one of the county council schools. Otherwise women are in the majority. Kalix Folk High School had 24% female students in 1983. That same year, Brunnsvik Folk High School, which provides political and trade-union education for educationally disadvantaged members of the labour movement, had only 11% women students. Of the 19 affiliated (popular movement) folk high schools with a majority of women, 16 had Christian mandators. Women predominate on certain specialised courses, such as Bible Studies and Parochial Social Worker courses. At Edelvik, Sigtuna and Vadstena, which have these very study programmes, more than 80% of students in 1983 were women.

Since 1985 there has existed one folk high school addressing itself expressly to women, viz the Göteborg Women's Folk High School. The folk high school run by the labour movement in the County of Stockholm gives priority to under-educated women (1987). Thirty or more folk high schools also offer special courses for women, and more than 70 courses in 1986/87 were reported to the NBE as being courses for women.

The adult education associations

Most circle participants come in search of practically useful knowledge, a pleasant spare-time occupation and contact with other people. Fifty-nine per cent of all study circle members were women. The proportion of women and men varies a great deal from one subject group to another, conforming on the whole to traditional sexual stereotypes. More than 90% of the members of circles such as needlework, china painting, weaving and dressmaking/care of clothing in 1987 were women.

Expressly masculine circles occur in fishing, hunting and game conservation, electronics, improvised music and technology.

Equal opportunities and popular education

"Popular education is a women's movement controlled and dominated by men" (the KVINNO project, NBE). Most of the students and most of those taking part in popular education work are women. The decision-making bodies and the leading appointments in popular education are dominated by men. Out of 128 folk high school principals in 1988, only 17 were women.

Of the permanent members of folk high school governing bodies, 65% were men. The same goes for the respective percentages of women and men on study programme and staff committees. Not quite 40% of folk high school teachers are women. Half of them work part time. Eighty per cent of the men work full time.

The male folk high school teachers concentrate more than their female colleagues on short-cycle courses and administrative duties. One of the eleven adult education associations has one female principal.

The executive committees of adult education associations are made up of representatives of their various member organisations. Twenty-six per cent of executive committee members in 1986/87 were women. A large proportion of national secretariat staff - 67% - are women. The closer one comes to local activities, the more female representatives one finds on adult education association committees, but usually the chairperson is a man and his deputy a woman.

No special, overriding equal opportunities objectives have been defined for folk high schools. Nor have any been defined for the activities of the adult education associations.

A number of official inquiries have been mounted, above all during the 1970s and 1980s, concerning the role of popular and adult education in the community. Typical of all these inquiries is that women have been invisible or have only been treated as an undefined group. Looking at the history of the popular movements, one finds the same thing. Women were active and took part in various ways, but in the majority of historical accounts they are conspicuous by their absence.

Purpose

The NBE project *Women's perspective on popular education* was launched in 1986 to elucidate the importance of popular education to women and vice versa. The KVINNO project has also devoted some effort to conveying a picture of the equality of the sexes in popular education. The overriding purpose of the project also included using the knowledge and experience gathered to support a continuing development of popular education initiatives for women and a growth of equality between men and women in popular and adult education.

Looking further ahead, the KVINNO project is aimed at helping to increase the ability of popular and adult education to cater to the instructional needs of women and men - regardless of sex - by articulating and utilising women's experience and knowledge just as much as men's.

This project, which has been operated for two years, has involved adult education associations and folk high schools. The KVINNO project reference group consisted of representatives of folk high schools, adult education associations and the NBE. Project leader was Ulla Tebelius, Halmstad University College.

The KVINNO project has had three tasks:

1. To chart equality of opportunity and to show where women are located in adult education associations, folk high schools and their activities.

2. To synthesise and analyse research into adult and popular education in women's perspective.
3. To compile an inventory and a description of the measures taken within adult education associations and folk high schools for, by and with women.

General survey

The inquiry confirms the image of folk high school as a sexually segregated institution. The participants' study programme choices are very much governed by sex and the report asks what the folk high schools are doing to counteract this.

Nearly half the female participants had worked in the caring and service sector, and nearly half of them also wanted to supplement their education with a view to changing jobs. A quarter of those who had children of their own did not have any regular childminding assistance.

All adult education associations had a number of general circles dealing with women's questions. None of them, however, had taken any special steps to adapt their activities to women's situation, beyond what the participants could achieve by themselves.

The equal opportunities situation within the various adult education associations has, to varying degrees, attracted attention at national federation level. The activities of the adult education associations are also divided into men's and women's worlds.

The Adult Schools' Educational Association (SV) has devoted more comprehensive, deliberate efforts to equal opportunities than the other adult education associations. SV has compiled an equal opportunities programme and a hints catalogue for the promotion of equality between the sexes.

ABF has charted the balance between men and women, e.g. in decision-making assemblies, divisions and district committees. Both ABF and TBV (the Salaried Employees' Educational Association) have organised activation measures at workplaces with the aim of starting information technology study circles for women.

The Folk University (FU) helped among other things to start "the Sex Roles Seminar" in Uppsala during the 1960s, at the initiative of Karin Westman-Berg.

The Citizens' Adult Educational Association has concentrated on women wishing to develop in industry. SKS, the Educational Association of the Church of Sweden, has intensified its equal opportunities promotion by focusing attention on women's contributions to international work and in the crafts tradition. Women's perspectives and experience have also been highlighted in the construction of material for Bible studies.

The free churches' educational association (FS) and the YMCA/YWCA (KFUK/M) have a large predominance of women, which in itself implies a women's perspective. Like other adult education associations with many female members, they feel that no special women's perspective needs to be presented, because activities are in any case designed by women. They also take the view that the circle is a study form particularly appropriate to women's needs and in itself conducive to a women's perspective.

The data collected have been compiled in a report entitled "On women and men in popular education" (SÖ-rapport R 88:14).

Adult education in a women's perspective - a research overview

The second task of the KVINNO project was a general summary and analysis of research about women, adult education and popular education. The report (in preparation), *Women in adult education. A research overview* (SÖ R 89:23), written by Viveca Alsbjer, is divided into four parts and is based on existing research. It shows that, with few exceptions, research has not taken women's specific questions as its starting point. Instead "women" have been viewed as an aspect of a problem. They have been included as a statistical variable and as part of a survey population.

What is more, research has employed a "top-down, externalised" perspective. The sources employed for describing, say, the history of popular education have to an excessive degree consisted of minutes of meetings, anniversary publications, conference reports and suchlike. The genuine

contributions made by women in and the active part which they have played in the work of popular education have not been brought out.

One important question asked in the report is whether the adult education reforms of the 1970s can be said to have succeeded "better" in their distributive ambitions with regard to women, i.e. this is a reasonable conclusion if all women can be looked on and treated as an underprivileged group.

There is a risk involved in adult education, according to the report, being used as a corrective for women only. This makes women the equal opportunities problem. Questions more in need of investigation are the profitability of formal adult education to women and the way in which more numerous and protracted study programmes improve women's conditions and situation in the labour market. The report refers to a great need for empirical and theoretical research into the functions of adult education in society's division of labour between the sexes.

The overview also deals with women's educational motives and impediments.

Surveys have shown that decisions by women to begin studying as adults are connected with changes in their situation in life. Education is looked on as part of a wider process which can be expected to result in change.

Women's economic situation, their responsibilities for the home and children, and their lack of self-confidence are also problematised and discussed in the report.

Summing up, it is observed that research into adult and popular education has hitherto been dominated by a quantitative view of knowledge, to the detriment of a view focusing on actions and change.

One of the questions which the KVINNO project seeks to highlight and problematise in a societal perspective is whether the solution to "the equal opportunities problem" lies in "educationally upgrading" women.

Sub-projects within the adult education associations

The third sub-project has been concerned with preparing an inventory and digest of measures taken by folk high schools and adult education associations specifically for women.

The adult education associations and folk high schools receiving project grants have taken part in two working conferences. The sub-projects undertaken by the adult education associations vary in character. FU has compiled an inventory of courses and activities addressed directly to women. SV has conducted in-depth interviews of 20 women, viz directors of studies, circle leaders, project leaders and circle members. The TBV project involved charting and documenting the organisation's activities for women. SKS has investigated women's representation within its decision-making and instructor functions as compared with circle activities. This study is supplemented by an analysis of causes and interrelationships. As regards women's motives for taking part in circle activities, the interviews point to a desire for knowledge. Where many women are concerned, this means knowledge for several roles in life, viz the community, vocational, family and recreational roles.

Women also outnumber men in SV circles, but they exert only limited influence. It is men who hold the top appointments. "The ground work" is done by women and dominated by their ideas. The SV project also includes a description of what it feels like to be the only woman on a governing body.

SKS observes that no deliberate effort has been devoted to women's questions and equal opportunities. A very large volume of activities, however, is conducted in traditionally feminine subject fields, especially fine arts. Nearly 70% of the people taking part in these circles are women. There are a number of activities addressed to women, most of them focusing on the maternal role.

The work of the folk high schools under the KVINNO project

The folk high schools taking part in the project were Fellingsbro, Fristad, Jämshög, the Women's Folk High School, Medlefors, Nyköping,

Skinnskatteberg, Sånga-Säby, Valla and Åsa. Four different emphases are identifiable.

- Three folk high schools - Fristad, Fellingsbro and Skinnskatteberg- have addressed themselves particularly to jobless women.
- Medlefors has conducted two sub-projects with a trade-union focus and connection.
- Sånga-Säby has addressed itself to women wishing to go in for politics.
- Jämshög and Valla have addressed themselves to "all" women.

Nyköping has studied the occupations of female students taking general study programmes at folk high schools, before and after their studies, and the extent to which their studies led them to continue their education or change occupations.

Åsa and the Women's Folk High School in Göteborg offer a one-year course for women. The courses offered to jobless women have been aimed at drawing attention to job opportunities in fields dominated by men. These courses have been aimed at giving women the self-confidence to go in for non-traditional jobs.

One thing which all the sub-projects had in common was the aim of boosting women's self-confidence, strengthening their powers of initiative and making them visible, both in history and in the present, but above all for the future.

One section of the report entitled "Two Women, Two Worlds" describes long interviews with two women, Anna and Mirjam, who have attended the Women's Folk High School in Göteborg. They are both about the same age, they both have children, but they come from different parts of the world and have different cultural backgrounds. The interviews and analyses were conducted by Barbro Svensson of the Department of Sociology, Göteborg University.

"Growing up in a culture means being trained in it without having any choice in the matter. When Anna grew up she learned that, as a Swedish girl, she was worth just as much as everybody else, if she knew what she

wanted she could get it, and, not least: that she was men's equal. There were no differences between men and women, there were possibly differences between individuals. Mirjam was taught something quite different.

"Mirjam grew up in a fundamentalist country where Islamic fundamentalism prevails, and for her there was no talk of equality between the sexes. Women and men are completely segregated, they are different, they have different tasks and obligations in life. To Mirjam it went without saying that men were worth more, women less. Neither Mirjam nor Anna could challenge these axioms, even though we who see them side by side wonder how it is possible for two such different ways of looking at the same thing to co-exist."

By various paths and in various ways, the two women entered the Women's Folk High School. In view of their different backgrounds, their lives and their experience of the school can serve as an example of the potential significance of popular education to women.

Reports from the KVINNO project*:

- Om kvinnor och män i folkbildningen. Ulla Tebelius. SÖ-rapport R 88:14. (On Women and Men in Popular Education)
- Kvinnor i folkbildningen. Vad gör studieförbund och folkhögskolor? Birgitta Sjöblom. SÖ-rapport R 89:17. (Women in Popular Education. What are adult education associations and folk high schools doing?)
- Kvinnor i vuxenutbildningen. En kunskapsöversikt. Viveca Alsbjer. SÖ-rapport R 88:23. (Women in Adult Education. A research overview.)
- Reports compiled by the adult education associations and folk high schools taking part in the KVINNO project.

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*In Swedish.

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